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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MELBOURNE 000093

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

STATE PLEASE PASS TO HOMELAND SECURITY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2019  
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PVPR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AS](#)  
SUBJECT: 4 ARRESTED IN MORNING TERROR RAIDS ACROSS VICTORIA  
C O R R E C T E D C O P Y -- REMOVE WORD (RSO) PARA 2

REF: A. MELBOURNE 90  
[B](#). MELBOURNE 18  
[C](#). 08 MELBOURNE 117  
[D](#). 08 MELBOURNE 66  
[E](#). 08 CANBERRA 909

Classified By: JUSTIN KOLBECK FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

Summary  
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[1](#)1. (SBU) Four men were arrested and 19 homes were raided in Victoria this morning by federal and state police as a result of an ongoing terror investigation. The four men were allegedly planning suicide attacks against Australian targets. Victorian Chief of Police Simon Overland praised the efforts of state and federal police. More details are expected be forthcoming when the suspects appear in court either today or tomorrow. Prime Minister Rudd made a statement reassuring the population that the Australian terror-threat level would not need to be raised. End Summary.

Embassy Canberra alerted by Australians  
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[1](#)2. (S/NF) August 3, the day before the arrests, the Australians briefed Embassy LEGATT and ORA on the upcoming police action in Melbourne and gave them the names of six Persons of Interest (POIs), NAYEF EL SAYED; WISSAM MAHMOUD FATTAL; YACQUB KHAYRE (just returned from Somalia); SANAY EDOW AWEYS; ABDIR AHMAN MAHMUD AHMED; AND WALID OSMAN MOHAMED, among whom Mr. Fattal, the Lebanese recruit to the movement, was already in custody on another charge and the last (Walid) remains in Somalia although with an outstanding warrant for his arrest. The other four are the persons of Somali descent arrested on August 4 in Melbourne.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) The men had been shopping in Somalia for a fatwah that would justify their planned terrorism in Australia although the imams they approached were not ready to give them what they wanted. Moreover, they used the outcome of the Benbrika case and Australia's presence in Iraq and Afghanistan as the justifying motives for their intended suicide attacks.

Phone Call Ignites Arrests  
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[1](#)4. (SBU) News media sources report that four men, all

Australian citizens, were arrested this morning in a series of police raids on homes across Victoria. According to Simon Overland, chief of the Victorian Police, and Australian Federal Police (AFP) acting commissioner Tony Negus, the men will be charged with crimes in the next 24 hours. Overland and Negus confirmed in a press conference that the men were planning to enter Australian military facilities and barracks with the intent to carry out a suicide mission using semi-automatic weapons. The Australian reports that the authorities observed the men carrying out surveillance on Australian Defense Force (ADF) bases in Victoria and Holsworthy Barracks near Sydney.

15. (SBU) Overland stressed that the raids were a culmination of a long investigation and cooperative effort by state and federal authorities. The Age reports that more than 400 officers from the AFP, Victorian Police, New South Wales Police, New South Wales Crime Commission, and the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) were involved in the investigation, dubbed Operation Neath. The Australian reports Operation Neath began after authorities intercepted a phone call from a Lebanese man who wished to go to Somalia to join Al-Shabaab, an extremist Islamic militant group based in Somalia with close links to Al Qaeda. (Comment: Al-Shabaab is not listed as a terrorist organization by Australia, though it is in the United States. End Comment.) Authorities were keeping close tabs on the man after he espoused extremist views in a mosque in the northern suburbs of Melbourne late last year. The Australian says that the Lebanese man, after being unable to gain access to Somalia, discussed with other hardliners

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carrying out attacks on Australian targets. Authorities decided to carry out the raids after a Somali man returned to Australia after training with Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

Flap over Alleged Leak

16. (SBU) The Australian newspaper reports that 4 men were arrested from the suburbs of Carlton, Preston, Glenroy, and Meadow Heights, all between the ages of 22 and 26. Additionally, raids were carried out in the suburbs of Roxburgh Park, Westmeadows, Broadmeadows, Epping, and Colac. Simon Overland was livid and said The Australian ran an exclusive on Operation Neath that went public at 1:30AM the morning of August 4, nearly three hours before the raids commenced. He said the story "jeopardized the operation and the lives of (his) officers" and vowed to launch an internal investigation into the leak. The Australian Editor in Chief Chris Mitchell disputes that any edition was published before the raids.

Comment

17. (SBU) The recent arrests of the Somali Australians, will likely bring international terrorism once more to the forefront of the public eye. The terror investigation is being called the second largest in Australian history, after the Benbrika terror case that ended with verdicts in September 2008 (reftel). It will focus on elements within the Somali community. According to the 2006 census, there were only 4314 Somali-born persons in Australia, though fully 60.7 percent resided in Melbourne. Overland and Prime Minister Rudd have both made express statements attributing the investigation to a few individual extremists only, and not to any larger community. ASIO's claim in its 2007-2008 Year in Review that terrorism represented the "most significant threat" to Australian security could again surface. It is also probable that close attention will be paid to the Attorney General's upcoming rollout of reforms for Australia's national security and counterterrorism laws. End Comment.

18. (SBU) Consulate Melbourne and Embassy Canberra  
coordinated on this cable  
THURSTON